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WOMAN TO WOMAN



MAKEOVER
MADNESS!

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LACK OF FOCUS

THE ARSENIC OF THE WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR

Story by Kathy McShane

Women today are building businesses with greater drive, commitment and determination than in any other period in history. And, ironically, this explosion in women-driven businesses has been at its peak during a recession that has created more economic and housing challenges than at any other point in history since the Great Depression.

These women are developing their businesses around products and services that have evolved from their own experiences – positive and negative – but more often from a desire to create a business model that is practical, useful and above all, cause-related.

But the road to their success has not always been an easy one. Often there are missteps in planning; realizations that the market they wanted to reach among other things has dried up or changed or there have been surprises in start-up costs and expenses...

A lot of women with whom I've worked – there have been more than 300 – have had wonderful ideas and passions that are part of their DNA. But for some reason, they just couldn't take the final step to launch a successful endeavor. And after long discussions and sharing countless ideas and dreams, I've come to the conclusion that the reason

some women have more difficulty than others is a very simple challenge – lack of focus.

These women are simply so filled with ideas for successful business models; they cannot decide which one to pursue, so they will try pursuing more than one, often making the mistake of thinking that several ideas will blend into one exciting business. Wrong! A successful entrepreneurial woman cannot make her business all things for all people. She must decide on one passion and one direction and make that her goal.

For the remainder of this article, I want to showcase several women with whom I've worked in my own business venture, Ladies Who Launch, and show how they've recognized the critical importance of focus in helping them to overcome obstacles they've faced. I want to share their stories so that other women who may be considering what they feel is "the business for them" can benefit and possibly use these guidelines.

For instance, Cathy Kangas, president and CEO of PRAI Beauty, launched a highly successful skincare products company whose various products are based on a botanical extract which has been used by

the royal families of Thailand. Highly focused, Cathy used the experiences of her career with world renowned Selfridge's Department Store in London, her management roles with Revlon and her sales training position at Cartier to build her new venture.

In addition, Cathy, a respected animal welfare advocate, also believes there is a need to support causes about which one feels passionately. But it is the foundation she created, "Beauty with a Cause," that provides her the greatest satisfaction. The Foundation supports animal organizations across the globe by dedicating a portion of PRAI Beauty's profits to a variety of causes.

Like Cathy, I am constantly amazed by other determined entrepreneurs whose determination and courage results in the development of an idea, incubates it, and eventually launches a new business venture. Another of these success stories is Sandy Oster who launched DecoratorTagSale.com. Sandy had a "light-bulb moment," as she told me, in a dim economic time. She took the fruits of her successful interior design business and molded them into a vibrant new venture.

"My second career came to me out of a need. I had been a successful interior designer for over 25 years. When you've designed homes for as long as I have, you end up with an expensive storage unit filled with luxurious goods that were not chosen for the intended project. It's just a hazard of the job." So she decided to turn her and fellow designer's treasures to cash by starting a website - DecoratorTagSale.com.

Along the way, Sandra learned some costly lessons. But she never lost her focus. In her words, "Starting an E-commerce business requires a powerful website with superior architecture behind the scenes, as well as a user-friendly interface that provides a successful consumer experience..."

"Social media wasn't HOT when I started my site just 3 short years ago. I learned that you must always allow room for growth and evolution. Your website must have the ability to plug in new technologies to keep you on the cutting edge...You can't build for the present, you must think forward-toward the future."

Sandra's other tips reflect her focus on success. "Due diligence is king," she added. "You just have to pay your dues with a lot of due diligence. Be productive. Don't waste time beating yourself up over mistakes. Sometimes our mistakes are the best teachers. Test your concept and prototype. Then test, retest, test and if necessary adopt new ways or change your concept. Finally, be sure your branding - your company image - conveys the proper messaging and clearly represents

your company identity. You only get one chance to make a great first impression."

Dream. Stick with your vision and believe in yourself has become the mantra of highly successful interior designer Christina Roughan Sullivan, who credits a friend and mentor with pushing her in the right direction. In Christina's words, "As a young child growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts, I knew I would be involved in something creative. I loved glamorous things, things that sparked, exquisite details."

Christina studied fashion design in college and abroad. While working as a design consultant for Ralph Lauren, Christina accepted a very different assignment from a long-time mentor who asked her if she'd like to design the apartment of her husband's friend. She was in her 20s.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'What do I know about residential design?' I took on the project and it not only led to several more luxury residential projects, but also to designing retail showrooms for Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan and Takashimaya."

In 2010, Christina embarked on a number of new and exciting happenings. She celebrated the birth of twin girls and she formed Roughan Interior Design. In just two years, the company expanded its market to Westchester and Fairfield Counties, Telluride, Colorado and Italy. Christina says that the company's vision "is marked by its timeless sophistication and ability to create a lifestyle for clients."

In my opinion, Christina stayed focused and moved in a successful direction almost from the beginning. She recognized where her real passion was and did not deviate. This has resulted in my description of her as the interior designer to the "stars."

Jane Pollak, Certified Professional Co-Active Coach (CPCC) and author of "Soul Proprietor: 101 Lessons from a Lifestyle Entrepreneur," attended

one of my Ladies Who Launch seminars where two women discussed the contrast between their business and a lifestyle business. "A lifestyle business," the women said, "is not created to be sold. It is designed to support the business owner and allow that person to pursue a passion throughout her life." Their story crystallized for Jane why she does what she does.

"I love my work. I love each day. I love my life," Jane told me. "I launched my own entrepreneurial career in the unlikely field of egg decoration. My story is an odyssey that led me from remote craft fairs and customer rejections to an invitation to the White House and



Cathy Kangas



Sandra Oster

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appearances on the Today Show.

“I now focus on coaching creative entrepreneurs – such as artists, designers, and writers – who want to achieve greater success. I was born to be a life coach but the industry didn't come into existence until the middle of my career. As it turned out, I needed those 30+ years as an entrepreneurial artist to prepare me for my ultimate calling.”

Anyone who has heard Jane speak is captivated by her energy, her enthusiasm, but most of all, by her focus and determination. She was a success story long before we met and Jane has given me so much in terms of building my own brand for Ladies Who Launch and strategies for my success.

Jennifer Covello's mantra when we worked together was “Be open to your vision

changing. You never know where your path may lead.” She calls herself a “mompreneur.”

“When I began my baby gift business, Fritabello, my vision was to become the best baby nursery collection in the world.”

While her focus on success never changed, Jennifer's career path changed from being the wholesaler/retailer who founded a successful baby gift business to recognizing her own parenting capabilities. As a result, she founded The Purposeful Parent and she is now a speaker, author and parenting mentor.

Debbie Fay founder and president of bespoke presentation solutions, llc founded her company, a public speaking, coaching, training and presentation development business in 2006.

She dreamed of being a public speaking



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Kathy Sachs



Jane Pollak

coach for at least a decade, but in her own words “it seemed like an impossible dream.”

“Who would hire me?” Debbie wondered. “My previous experience consisted of corporate training, teaching in a business school and directing a talent show for 150 kids, teachers and parents. In fact, I had tried the safer route first, teaching high school history. Even after a very successful stint as a long-term substitute teacher, no jobs were to be had. So I took a deep breath and jumped with both feet into my unsafe alternative, having my own business.

Debbie’s advice for starting a business is right on target with the importance of focus. “Do what you love. Do ONE thing and do it really well. Don’t be what I call the “Chinese/Italian Restaurant.” When I drive by the Chinese/Italian restaurant, I don’t go in. The chef can’t possibly do both cuisines well. I don’t know which one he can do well, and I’m not going to take the risk of finding out.”

For Kathy Sachs, CEO/Owner, Arts & Iterations and Le Barn Antiques, the most difficult part of starting her businesses 40 years ago was building and maintaining a client base. “You may have a brilliant idea or product, but there’s a lot more to being successful than that,” she said. “You need to invest in a great marketing strategy that works for your particular business, which includes integrating a variety of

social media tools. Also, knowing your budgetary limitations and adhering to them is critical when executing a marketing plan.”

But Kathy couldn’t continue to just focus on the marketing tools she’d used 40 years ago. As she points out, “Simply having an online presence isn’t enough. You really have to be tech-savvy in today’s world because there are so many different ways to communicate with people

who are always on the move. I have to be aware of the continuing shift to mobile web access as well as establishing brand identity in order to continue to be successful. It never stops. I’m always aware of not only what, but how I’m communicating to my client base.

“One thing that hasn’t changed is maintaining integrity while doing business. At the end of the day, my customers are my best marketing tools. Repeat business and customer referrals continue to be my greatest compliment.”

Each of these women began her entrepreneurial adventure with a dream and a passion. And a few were carried toward these adventures by related experiences or a crossroads in their lives that caused them to rethink priorities and goals.

Like these women, I have always been an entrepreneur at heart. I was in the corporate world for many years and I gravitated to areas where new ideas were being discovered and being launched. I spent 10

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years in the new product development area for companies like American Express, Citibank and MasterCard. I also turned a division of a market research company that had not earned a profit since its inception two years earlier around and made them profitable in just 9 months. When I left corporate life, I started a marketing communications company that grew to be a multi-million dollar company.

In fact, when I started that marketing communications business, I created a job sharing arrangement. Each of my staff would come in 2 and ½ days per week. They would then turn the work over to their job share partner. Everyone told me that it would never work. I simply would not listen and I did it. In turn, I gave these women the other part of their lives back. They could be professionals as well as mothers. I was given an award for Innovation in the Workplace by Bill Gates, former CEO of Microsoft.

Throughout all of these endeavors, I mentored women on how to achieve their dreams. I took a Ladies Who Launch Incubator workshop and fell in love with their methodology. I realized that working with women was still my passion. I felt that I could combine this methodology with my extensive marketing experience and really make a difference in women's lives. I knew I could help them to fulfill their dreams.

Above all else, I believe that a smart and successful woman entrepreneur must remain focused, never taking her eye off the goal. She should develop a support team that will offer a cold, hard assessment of your company and strategy. She should surround herself, as I have tried to do, with individuals who are smarter than she is and who can help her find her way back to the path that will lead to success.



Kathy McShane, Managing Director of the Connecticut chapter of Ladies Who Launch, helps women of all ages and stages in their lives to achieve their dream of launching or expanding their own business.

From top left: Debbie Faye, Christina Roughan and Jennifer Covello